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MC FARIANE
94

OLIFF

image COMICS PRESENTS:

"the DARK"



story

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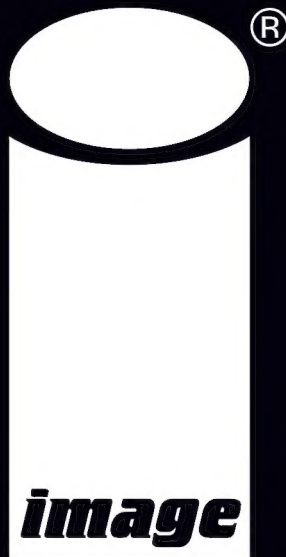
Dedicated to:
DAVE SIM

FOR IMAGE COMICS

LARRY MARDER - exec. director TONY LOBITO - publisher

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image

EVIL.

IT'S NOT A GOAL
THAT PEOPLE
CONSCIOUSLY SET
FOR THEMSELVES,
YET MILLIONS...
BILLIONS... HAVE
BEEN EMBRACED
BY ITS SEDUCTIVE
COILS.

IT CAN HIDE BEHIND
A VARIETY OF GUISES:

POWER.
DESIRE.
COMPETITION.
JUSTIFICATION.
SELF-INTEREST.



THOUGH MOST PROFESS
THEIR INNOCENCE, EACH
OF US HAS FACED IT IN
OUR LIVES... EACH OF US
HAS TOUCHED IT, HOWEVER
BRIEFLY. THE BIBLE CALLS IT
SIN, AND HAS IDENTIFIED
ITS ROOT:

THE LOVE
OF MONEY.

IF THE THOUGHT OF AN HONEST
WAGE TO COVER HONEST EXPEN-
SES SEEMS LIKE A SIGN OF
STUNTED GROWTH... IF IT
DOESN'T MATTER WHERE THE
PROFIT COMES FROM, OR WHERE
IT GOES... **WATCH OUT!**



TRADE AND BARTER
ARE REAL. CASH
CAN BE USED FOR
ANY THING OR
ACTIVITY: IT'S AN
ABSTRACT. MONEY
COMES FROM
NOWHERE
AND PROMISES
EVERYTHING

IF YOUR
MOTIVES
AREN'T
CLEAN,
MONEY
ITSELF
BECOMES
EVIL.

BUT-- WHEN WE
DON'T HAVE
ENOUGH MONEY,
ENOUGH EVIL, THE
WORLD TELLS US
WE'RE LOSERS. SO,
WHAT DETERMINES
OUR PLACE IN
SOCIETY IS NOT
HOW MUCH KIND-
NESS IS IN OUR
HEARTS BUT HOW
MUCH EVIL IS IN
OUR WALLETS.

TYPICALLY, WE
DISTILL EFFORT
INTO VALUE IN
TWO-WEEK
BATCHES.

WE LOOK FORWARD
TO IT. WE **NEED** IT.
WE CALL IT PAYDAY.

A LACK OF
THIS EVIL
CAN **COST** US.
DEARLY.

WHAT?!

THEY CAN'T DO THAT,
NO WAY! YOU STOP
THEM! YOU
GET MY
LITTLE GIRL
BACK!



I'M SORRY,
MR. BARNETT,
BUT THE JUDGE'S
DECISION HAS
ALREADY BEEN
HANDLED
DOWN.

I DID EVERY-
THING I COULD.
UNFORTUNATELY,
THE LAW ALLOWS
US NO FURTHER
APPEALS.

DON'T
HAND ME THAT
BULL! YOU'RE A
LAWYER,
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO
HELP ME!

WHAT AM
I PAYING
YOU FOR?!

ACTUALLY
YOU'RE NOT,
MR. BARNETT.
I'M A PUBLIC
DEFENDER.
MY BILL
ISN'T YOUR
RESPONSIB-
ILITY.

AS FOR YOUR
DAUGHTER, I KNOW
THERE'S NOTHING I
CAN SAY THAT WILL
MAKE THIS ANY EASIER,
BUT THE JUDGE FEELS
SHE'LL BE BETTER
OFF WITH FOSTER
PARENTS AS
PROVIDERS.

I'M NOT
SAYING
IT'S FAIR...

**FAIR?
FAIR!!**

YOU
ASK **KATIE**
ABOUT FAIR!
SHE WANTS TO
STAY WITH ME.
SHE WON'T
GO!

SHE
DOESN'T HAVE
A CHOICE.
NONE OF US DO.
I'LL SEE YOU
TOMORROW
AT TEN.

CLICK!

SWEET
JESUS.

WHAT
KIND OF
COUNTRY
SENDS A
CHILD FROM
HER DAD.

NEW YORK STATE
COURTHOUSE,
STATEN ISLAND:
THE NEXT DAY.

WOULD YOU
CARE TO SAY ANYTHING
BEFORE I GIVE MY
RULING, MR. BARNETT?

PLEASE,
YOUR HONOR,
KATIE'S ALL I GOT. YOU
CAN'T TAKE HER AWAY
FROM ME. SHE'S ONLY
FOURTEEN BUT SHE
KNOWS SO MUCH,
THIS WHOLE THING
IS TEARING HER
TO PIECES.

SHE
DESERVES
BETTER
THAN ALL
THIS.

I WOULD
AGREE, MR.
BURNETT.

I HAVE
CONSIDERED
THE FACT THAT
KATE VALUES
YOU AS HER
FATHER, AND
HER STATED WISH
TO REMAIN A
PART OF YOUR
HOUSEHOLD.

THIS
DECISION
HAS BEEN ONE
OF THE TOUGHEST
OF MY CAREER.

THAT IS WHY,
AFTER A VERY LONG
AND DIFFICULT DELIBERA-
TION, I'VE DECIDED TO
REMOVE HER FROM YOUR
CARE AND PUT HER IN A
NEW SET OF CIRCUM-
STANCES. THIS, I
BELIEVE, IS FOR HER
OWN GOOD.

SINCE THE
DEATH OF YOUR
WIFE FIFTEEN MONTHS
AGO, THE STATE HAS
BEEN REVIEWING YOUR FILES.
AT THE TIME OF KATE'S
ADOPTION IN 1982, YOU
AND YOUR WIFE WERE
ABLE TO PROVIDE A
STABLE, SAFE
ENVIRONMENT.

UNFORTUNATELY,
THE UNTIMELY LOSS OF
YOUR WIFE HAS REMOVED
THE MOTHER FIGURE FROM THE
CHILD'S LIFE. ADD TO THAT YOUR
STEADY LACK OF EMPLOYMENT
FOR OVER ELEVEN MONTHS AND
YOUR CURRENT LIVING CONDI-
TIONS. I FEEL I HAVE **NO**
CHOICE BUT TO PLACE HER
WITH FOSTER PARENTS WHO
MIGHT BETTER PROVIDE
FOR HER FUTURE.

IF IN THE
COMING YEARS YOU
CAN SHOW THIS COURT
A LIVING SITUATION
CONDUSIVE TO A YOUNG
TEENAGER'S NEEDS,
AN AUXILIARY APPEAL
MAY BE FILED.

DO YOU
UNDERSTAND?

HE UNDERSTANDS, ALL RIGHT. TWELVE YEARS OF LOVE,
CARING AND TENDERNESS MEAN **NOTHING** IF YOU CAN'T
AFFORD TO PAY FOR A
COLLEGE EDUCATION.

FRED BARNETT DOESN'T HAVE
ENOUGH MONEY. ENOUGH EVIL.

THE DANCING FLAMES IN HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL ARE LACED WITH THE SCENT OF BILE AND OTHER ORGANIC MATTER. OVERSEEING THE UNIMAGINABLE AREA, ITS SELF-IMPOSED RULER DOMINATES ALL. HE IS THE **MALEBOLGIA**, A DEVIL, ONE OF MANY WHO OCCUPY THE MYRIAD LAYERS WHICH COMPRISE THIS PLACE.

HIS ULTIMATE GOAL: THE BUILDING OF ARMIES, CONSISTING OF LOST SOULS FROM THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS. THEY WILL EVENTUALLY CARRY HIS STANDARD AGAINST HEAVEN, AT **ARMAGEDDON**.

AT THE FORE WILL BE HIS OFFICERS. THESE MOST EXCELLENT OF THE DAMNED, SINGLED OUT FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS IN COMBAT, WILL DRILL THEIR NIGHTMARISH TACTICS INTO THE TROOPS AT THEIR DISPOSAL.

THESE ARE HIS ELITE. THESE ARE HIS **HELL-SPAWN**.

EACH HAS A SPECIFIC DESTINY TO FULFILL, THOUGH NONE REALIZED IT AT THE TIME OF THEIR "RECRUITMENT."

IT IS ONE SUCH SPAWN WHO IS NOW UNDER THE MALEBOLGIA'S WATCHFUL EYE: THE OFFICER-IN-TRAINING WHO'S NATIVE TO THE EARTH... THE ONE FORMERLY CALLED **LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS**.

"COME, MY PETS, LET ME AMUSE YOU WITH ANOTHER TALE," HISSES THE MALEBOLGIA. HE LEANS FORWARD, CHIN RESTING COYLY ON HIS HAND. HE CONTINUES, "THOUGH THEY ALL RESIST, THE HELL-SPAWN HAVE **ALWAYS** BECOME GREAT LEADERS FOR MY ARMY... THOSE THAT SURVIVE THE TRAINING. THERE HAVE BEEN A **FEW** DISAPPOINTMENTS. IT IS THEIR INTERNAL STRUGGLES BACK ON THEIR HOME PLANETS WHICH INTRIGUE ME... THE **HUNT**, IF YOU WILL."

AS HIS CRYPTIC DISSERTATION UNFOLDS, THE INHABITANTS, BOTH RESIDENT AND DAMNED, SHIFT CLOSER. THE MALEBOLGIA LEANS BACK AND SMILES.

"LET ME UPDATE YOU ON OUR NEWEST SELECTION... OUR NEWEST **SPAWN**."

GOD.

EVERYTHING'S
SO MESSED UP.

I'M NOT
THINKING
STRAIGHT
ANYMORE.
NOT USING
MY TRAINING
LIKE I SHOULD.

THIS WHOLE THING
IS ABOUT ME
AND WANDA.

I'VE BEEN SO
DAMN DISTRACTED
BY ALL THIS
UNBELIEVABLE
CRAP!

THE MAFIA.

HITMEN.


COPS.

EVEN
THE BOYS
IN THE
ALLEYS.

BUT AT LEAST I'VE
STOPPED HIDING LIKE
SOME COWERING DOG.

NOW THEY
KNOW I EXIST...
AND WHAT I'M
CAPABLE OF.

BALL'S IN
THEIR COURT.



LET'S SEE IF THEY CAN
COME UP WITH SOME
BETTER ANSWERS ABOUT
WHAT I'VE BECOME.

ALL I KNOW IS THAT
SINCE I GOT THESE
POWERS, I'VE BECOME
SOME FRIGGIN'
MAGNET FOR EVERY-
BODY'S ANGER.

PLUS, I SEEM TO BE
USING THE CONFLICTS
AS A WAY OF AVOIDING
HAVING TO FACE
WANDA AGAIN. *

LIKE I'M
STALLING.

YOU'RE NOT.
YOU'RE
ACQUIRING
KNOWLEDGE--
THOUGH YOU
AREN'T AWARE
OF THAT.

WHO--?!

* NOT SINCE
ISSUE THREE
-- TOM --



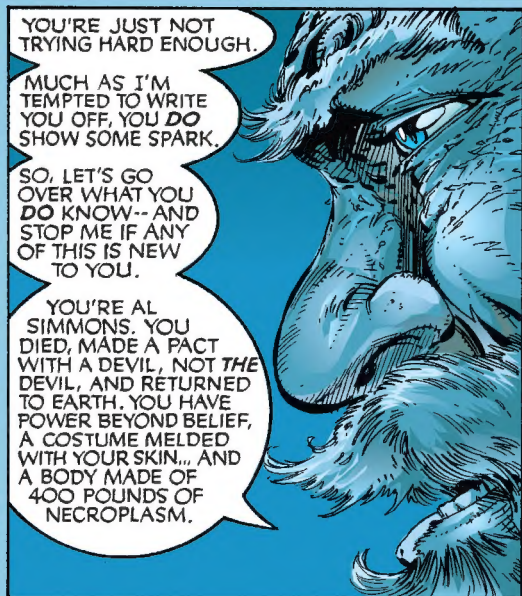
SURELY, IT HASN'T BEEN SO LONG THAT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN YOUR FRIEND THE COUNT? YOUR LIFE HAS BECOME SOMEWHAT COMPLICATED.

WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?

HOW DO YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT ME? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU ANYWAY?

I'M NOT YOUR CONCERN. YOU TORTURE YOURSELF FOR ANSWERS THAT, MOSTLY, YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN.

SEE ISSUE 9 -- Tony

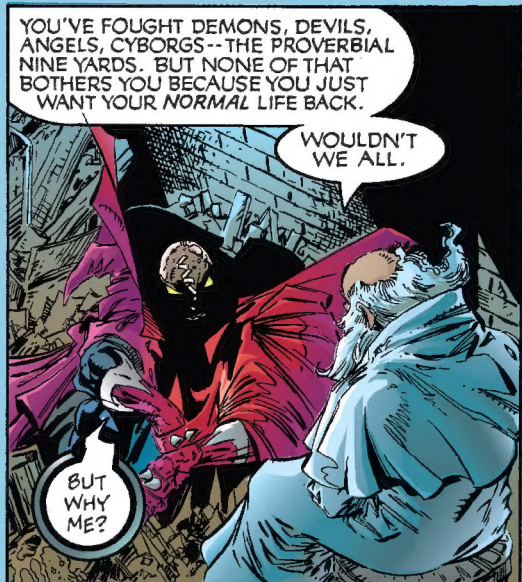


YOU'RE JUST NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH.

MUCH AS I'M TEMPTED TO WRITE YOU OFF, YOU DO SHOW SOME SPARK.

SO, LET'S GO OVER WHAT YOU DO KNOW-- AND STOP ME IF ANY OF THIS IS NEW TO YOU.

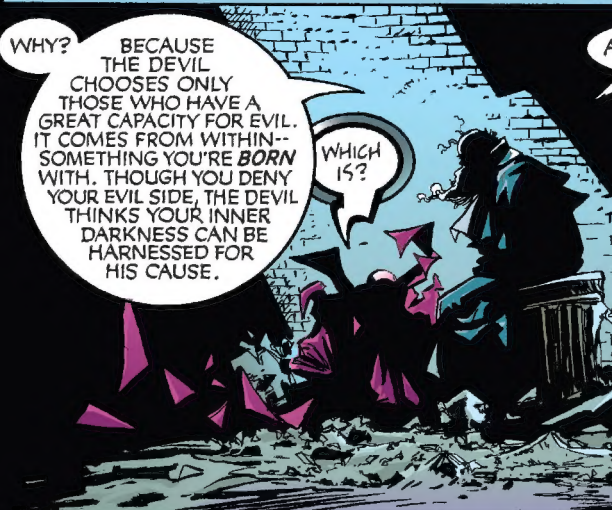
YOU'RE AL SIMMONS. YOU DIED, MADE A PACT WITH A DEVIL, NOT THE DEVIL, AND RETURNED TO EARTH. YOU HAVE POWER BEYOND BELIEF, A COSTUME MELDED WITH YOUR SKIN... AND A BODY MADE OF 400 POUNDS OF NECROPLASM.



YOU'VE FOUGHT DEMONS, DEVILS, ANGELS, CYBORGS--THE PROVERBIAL NINE YARDS. BUT NONE OF THAT BOTHERS YOU BECAUSE YOU JUST WANT YOUR NORMAL LIFE BACK.

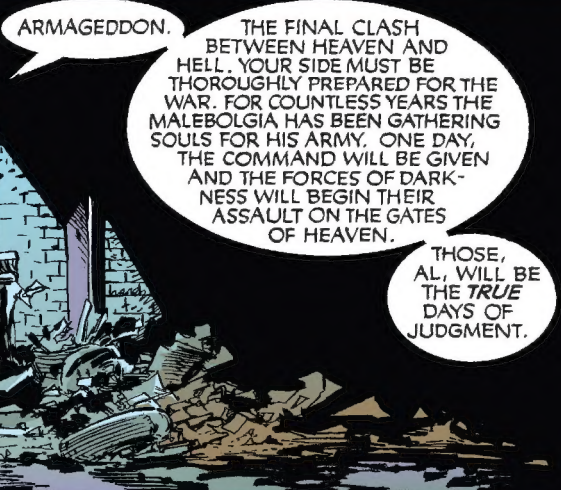
WOULDN'T WE ALL.

BUT WHY ME?



WHY? BECAUSE THE DEVIL CHOOSES ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE A GREAT CAPACITY FOR EVIL. IT COMES FROM WITHIN-- SOMETHING YOU'RE BORN WITH. THOUGH YOU DENY YOUR EVIL SIDE, THE DEVIL THINKS YOUR INNER DARKNESS CAN BE HARNESSSED FOR HIS CAUSE.

WHICH IS?



ARMAGEDDON.

THE FINAL CLASH BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL. YOUR SIDE MUST BE THOROUGHLY PREPARED FOR THE WAR. FOR COUNTLESS YEARS THE MALEBOGIA HAS BEEN GATHERING SOULS FOR HIS ARMY. ONE DAY, THE COMMAND WILL BE GIVEN AND THE FORCES OF DARKNESS WILL BEGIN THEIR ASSAULT ON THE GATES OF HEAVEN.

THOSE, AL, WILL BE THE TRUE DAYS OF JUDGMENT.



THE MONOLOGUE CONTINUES.

"THOUGH MY HELL-SPAWN ARE PERMANENTLY ENSNARED, THEY CONTINUE TO TEST THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR CAGE," HISSES THE BLOATED TYRANT. "THEY WILL SCURRY AROUND, AT FIRST HOPING, *DREAMING* THAT THERE IS A WAY OUT... BUT THERE *IS* NONE. THEY HAVE *TWO CHOICES* ONLY: ACQUIRE THE TROOPS AND INSPIRE THE LOYALTY AFFORDED A FIRST-RATE OFFICER, OR *PERISH*... AND THEN ANSWER ETERNALLY FOR FRUSTRATING ME IN THE PURSUIT OF MY GOALS.

"LET'S SEE HOW OUR DEAR *AL SIMMONS* DEALS WITH HIS SITUATION."

LEANING BACKWARDS, THE MALEBOLGIA PUSHES HIS FEET FURTHER INTO THE SEARING FLAMES. NEARER CLIMB THE LESSER SPAWN, ANXIOUS TO LEARN WHY IT WAS SIMMONS PICKED FROM AMONG THE MULTITUDE OF DESERVING DAMNED.

"Ah. I SEE THAT YOU TOO ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS," CACKLES THE MALEBOLGIA. "HOW IRONIC THAT AS SIMMONS TORTURES HIMSELF, CASTING ABOUT FOR ANSWERS, *YOU*, HIS FUTURE TROOPS, ARE CURIOUS ABOUT THOSE SAME QUESTIONS.

"WHY HIM? WHY *AL SIMMONS*?"

A SMILE CROSSES HIS CRACKED LIPS, THE STORY-TELLER RELISHES THE ADORATION OF THE RAPT, IF CAPTIVE, AUDIENCE.

"LET ME TELL YOU WHAT MAKES A *TRUE* HELL-SPAWN."



SO I'M JUST
A PUPPET. THAT'S
ENCOURAGING.

THINGS WERE
SO SIMPLE WHEN I
WAS ALIVE. I FOLLOWED
ORDERS. KILLED WHO
THE GOVERNMENT TOLD
ME, AND COLLECTED A
STEADY PAYCHECK.

**BUT NOW
THIS!**

I DON'T HAVE A
HOME OR A WIFE
TO GO BACK TO, AND
ALL I SEEM TO DO
IS FIGHT SOMEONE
ELSE'S BATTLES.

NO ONE
SAID BEING
DEAD WAS
GOING TO
BE EASY,
AL.

AIN'T THAT
THE TRUTH. TELL
ME SOMETHING,
COUNT, WHY PUT
ME IN THE FUTURE.
FIVE YEARS. WHAT'S
THE POINT?

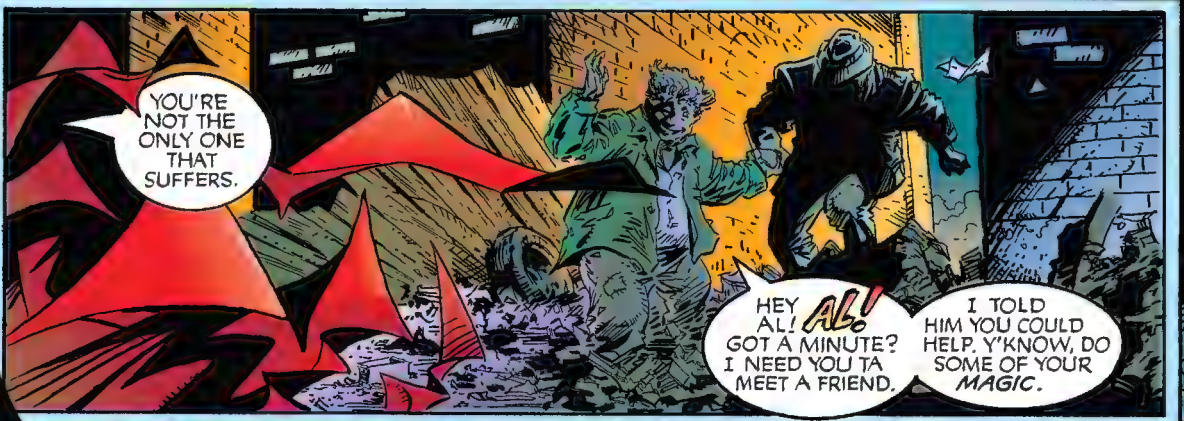
A
TEST.

ONE OF
MANY YOU
MUST PASS TO
FULFILL YOUR *DESTINY*.
THE DEVILS, BY NATURE,
ARE TRICKSTERS. THEY
THRIVE ON BENDING
THE RULES OF EVERY
GAME THEY PLAY.

YOU WANTED
BACK TO EARTH. HE
GAVE YOU THAT.
UNFORTUNATELY, HAVING
NEVER BEEN DEAD BEFORE,
YOU WEREN'T AWARE OF
YOUR *RIGHTS*. SINCE YOU
DIDN'T SPECIFY ANY CONDI-
TIONS WITH YOUR REQUEST,
THE MALEBOLGIA
GRANTED YOU THE
TIME TO SEE YOUR
WIFE. *THAT'S*
ALL.

HE GAVE
YOU *ONE* THING.
EVERYTHING ELSE
WAS HIS TO
DETERMINE. A PRETTY
SOUR TRADE,
I'D SAY.

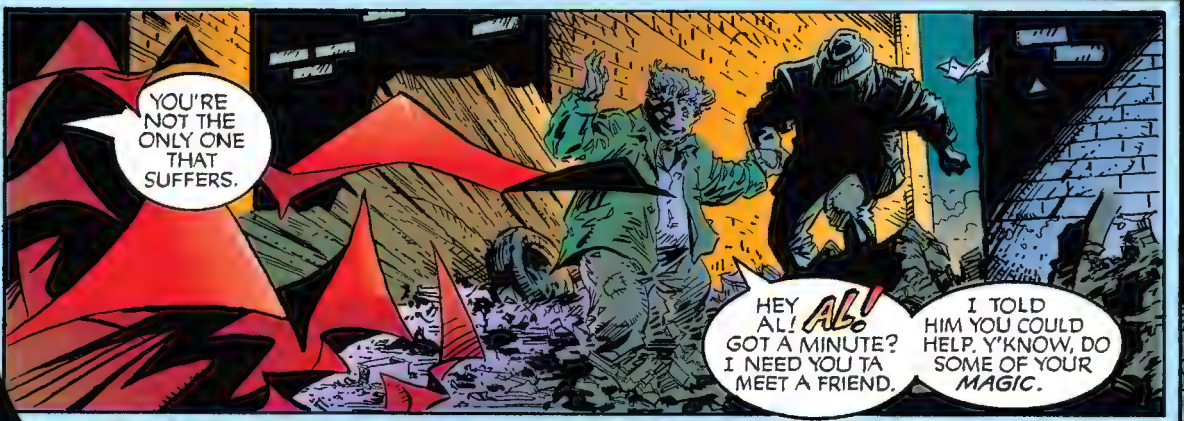
BUT DON'T
FEEL BAD.
THERE'VE BEEN
PLENTY OF
OTHERS.



YOU'RE
NOT THE
ONLY ONE
THAT
SUFFERS.

HEY
AL! *AL!*
GOT A MINUTE?
I NEED YOU TO
MEET A FRIEND.

I TOLD
HIM YOU COULD
HELP. Y'KNOW, DO
SOME OF YOUR
MAGIC.

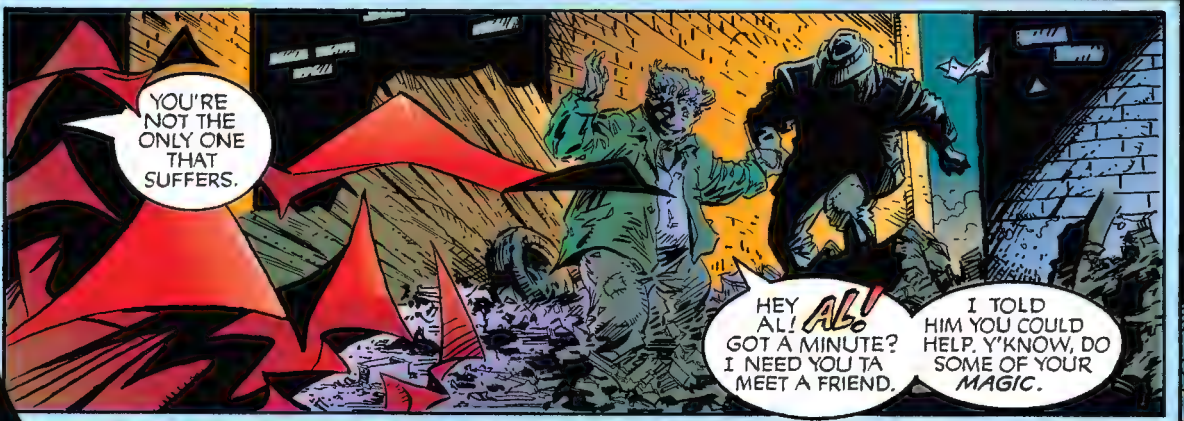


WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?

I KNOW WE'VE NEVER
MET FORMALLY, BUT I LIVE
AROUND HERE TOO... SEEN ALL
THE CRAZY STUFF THAT'S BEEN
HAPPENING. WELL *ANYWAYS*, THIS
HERE IS *FRED BARNETT*, AN OLD
PAL FROM 'WAY BACK. HE'S GOT
A BIT OF A PROBLEM.
DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

SO I TOLD HIM
YOU COULD POSSIBLY
HELP. GIVE HIM THE
SCOOP, FREDDY.

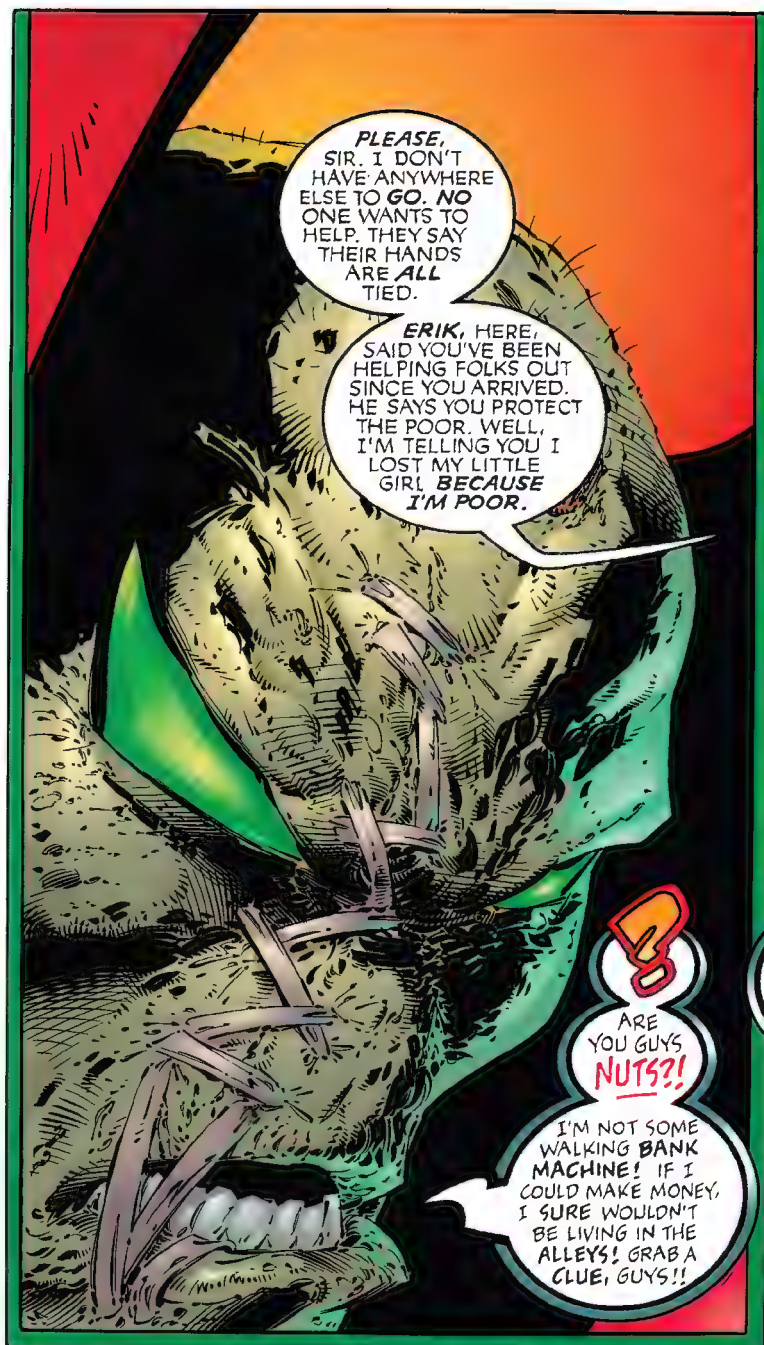
'EVENING,
SIR.



YESTERDAY
THE COURTS TOOK
MY *DAUGHTER* AWAY
FROM ME. AFTER *TWELVE*
YEARS THEY JUST TOOK MY
BABY FROM ME. THEY
SAY I'M NOT *FIT* TO
BE A PARENT ANY
LONGER.

AND
IT'S ALL
BECAUSE OF
MONEY.

THE JUDGE
SAYS I'VE GOT
TO *PROVIDE*
BETTER. *GIVE*
HER MORE THINGS.
THEN I CAN HAVE
MY LITTLE *KATIE*
BACK.



PLEASE, SIR. I DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO. NO ONE WANTS TO HELP. THEY SAY THEIR HANDS ARE **ALL** TIED.

ERIK, HERE, SAID YOU'VE BEEN HELPING FOLKS OUT SINCE YOU ARRIVED. HE SAYS YOU PROTECT THE POOR. WELL, I'M TELLING YOU I LOST MY LITTLE GIRL **BECAUSE** I'M POOR.



ARE YOU GUYS **NUTS?!**

I'M NOT SOME WALKING **BANK** MACHINE! IF I COULD MAKE MONEY, I SURE WOULDN'T BE LIVING IN THE ALLEYS! GRAB A CLUE, GUYS!!



I'M HERE TO STOP ANYONE FROM HASSLING THOSE ON MY TURF-- ESPECIALLY ANYONE WHO'S AFTER ME. I PROTECT THE FOLKS WITHIN MY AREA-- NOT THOSE FROM OUTSIDE.

NOW GO!

AND DON'T YOU EVER DO THIS AGAIN, ERIK.

BITE ME!!

SORRY, FRED. I THOUGHT HE WAS SOMEONE WHO **GAVE** A DAMN.

WHAT WILL I DO NOW?

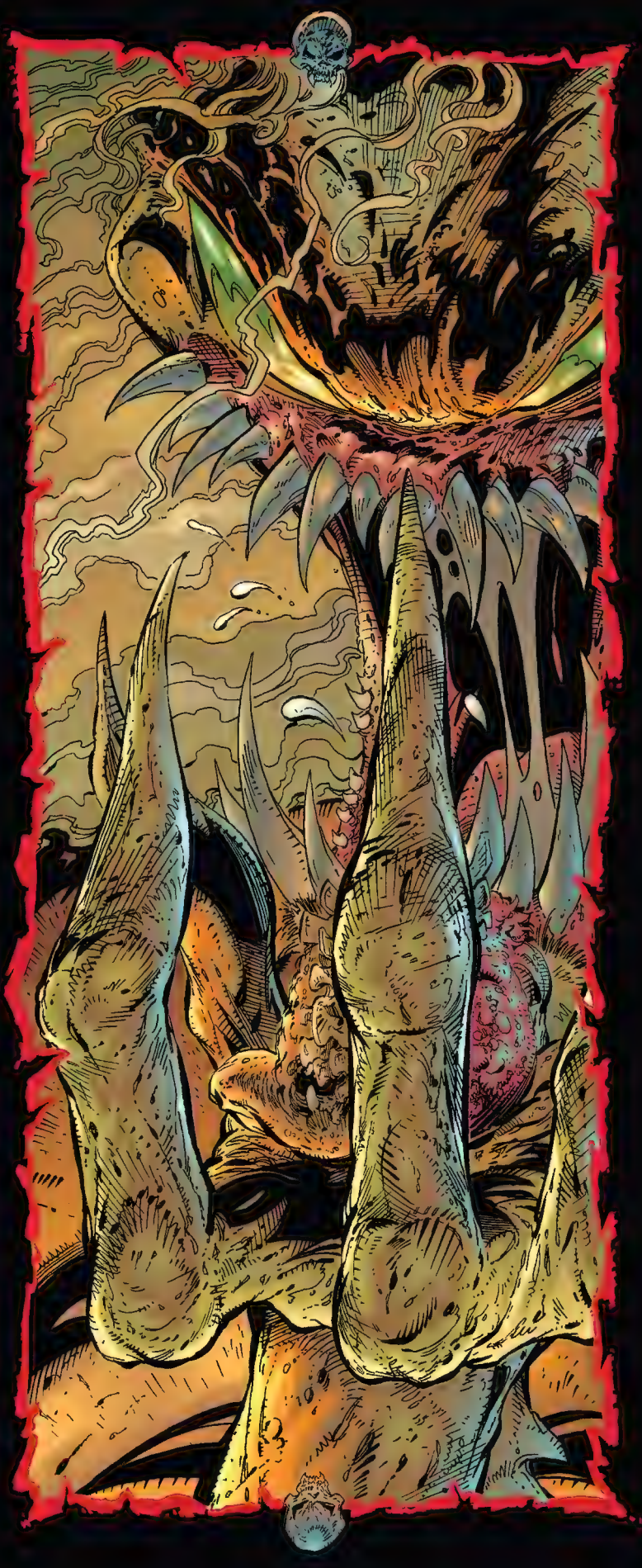


YOU SHOULDN'T BE SO HARSH. THEY SEE YOU AS A SAVIOR. EVERYONE ELSE THINKS YOU'RE EVIL.

THEY'RE GETTING TOO COCKY. SOME OF THE GUYS THINK I'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING. "GOOD OL' AL-- HE'LL FIX IT!"

OBTAININGLY, I'M GIVING THEM A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY.

NO. YOU'VE GIVEN THEM **HOPE**. IT'S SOMETHING MOST OF THEM HAD LOST.



"POWER!" - SCREECHES THE MALEBOLGIA, "IT BOTH MOTIVATES AND ENABLES THE TRULY CHOSEN. THE SPAWN IS BEING HUNTED BY EVERY AGENCY IMAGINABLE, AND THE ONLY THING THAT CAN *SAVE* HIM IS HIS INFERNALLY-INSPIRED **POWER!**

"I TRANSFORM THE RECRUITS INTO CREATURES OF MAGIC. EVENTUALLY THEY LEARN THAT THEIR INNER POOL OF ENERGY WILL ONE DAY BE DRAINED. IT IS *THEN* THAT THE TRAINING BEGINS IN EARNEST.

"THEIR **REBIRTH** PLACES THEM AT A FOUR-WAY **CROSSROAD**.

"THEY CAN DO **NOTHING**... LOCK THEMSELVES AWAY FROM THEIR SURROUNDINGS... WHICH TURNS THEIR HEARTS COLD. IN TIME, VERY GRADUALLY, THEIR ENERGIES ARE SPENT ANYWAY.

"THEY CAN CONVINCE THEMSELVES THEY'RE **HEROIC**, WHILE UNWITTINGLY ACTING ON THE IMPULSES WHICH DAMNED THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY WILL SINGLE OUT AND PUNISH THE EVIL ONES AROUND THEM... EVIL **SOULS** WHICH THEN ARE **MINE**.

"THEY MAY CHOOSE THE PATH OF **DARKNESS**, AGGRESSIVELY DISPATCHING THOSE MOST VENAL AND VICIOUS, WHO'VE **EARNED** THEIR PLACE HERE.

"OR THEY MAY **DESPAIR**, AND PERISH THROUGH CARELESSNESS OR DESIGN.

"IN ANY CASE, THE SPAWN WILL RETURN TO ME, EITHER AS VALUED **OFFICERS**... OR AS A SOURCE OF **NOURISHMENT** FOR MY HUNGRY ARMIES!"

THE SUB-OVERLORD CASTS A SPASTIC ARM FORWARD. IT'S A GESTURE OF **TRIUMPH**.



WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME?

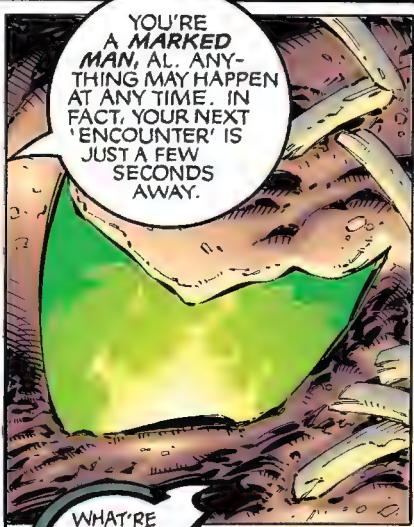
JUST BEWARE. THERE ARE AN INFINITE NUMBER OF FORCES IN OUR REALITY AND EACH HAS AN AGENDA IT WISHES TO FULFILL.

MEANING, I'D BETTER GET USED TO ALL THIS CRAP 'CAUSE IT'S HERE TO STAY?

NOT EXACTLY.



WATCH VERY CAREFULLY. LOOK, LISTEN AND LEARN. THINGS MAY NOT ALWAYS BE AS THEY SEEM.

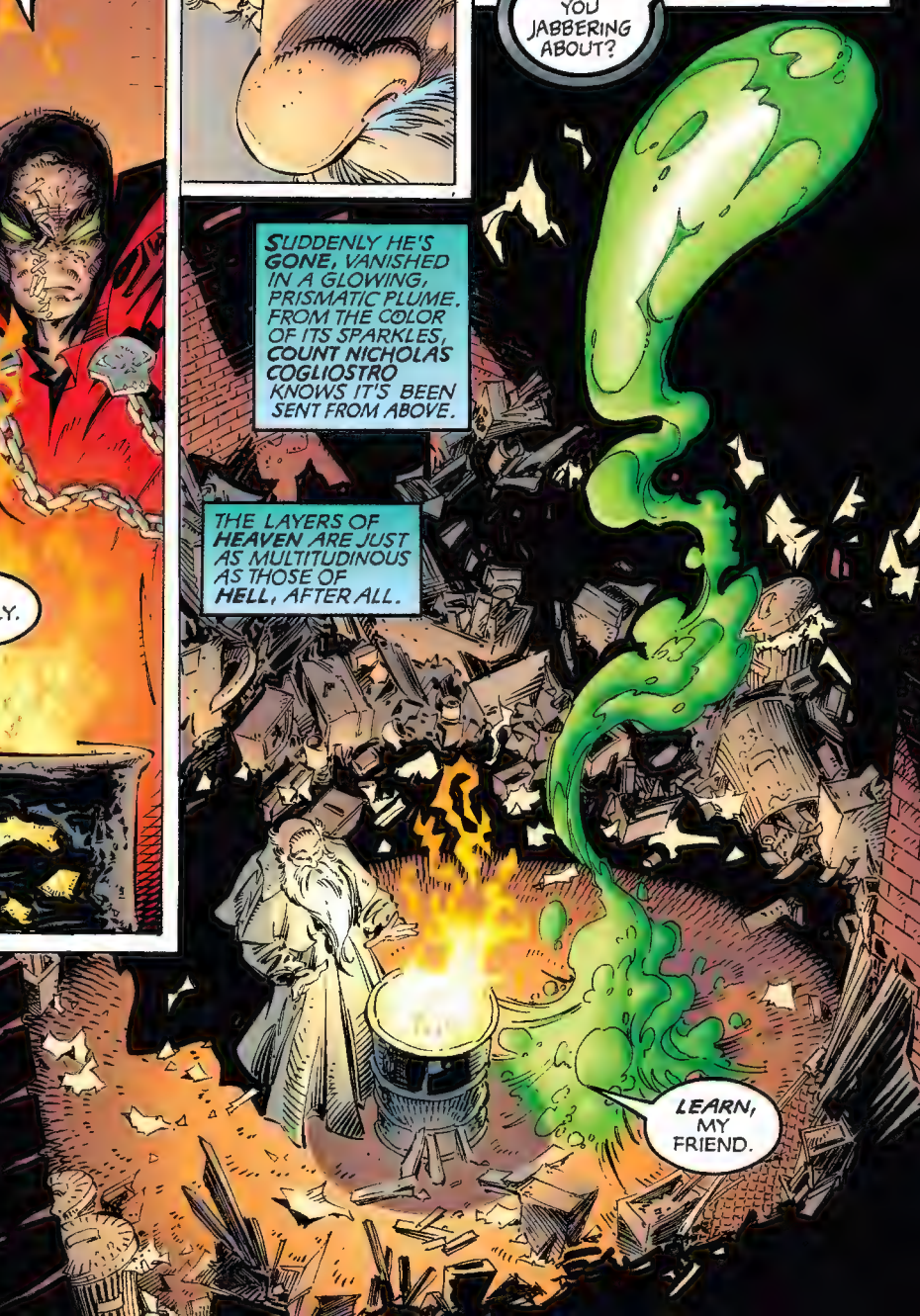


YOU'RE A MARKED MAN, AL. ANYTHING MAY HAPPEN AT ANY TIME. IN FACT, YOUR NEXT 'ENCOUNTER' IS JUST A FEW SECONDS AWAY.

WHAT'RE YOU JABBERING ABOUT?

SUDDENLY HE'S GONE, VANISHED IN A GLOWING, PRISMATIC PLUME. FROM THE COLOR OF ITS SPARKLES, COUNT NICHOLAS COGLIOSTRO KNOWS IT'S BEEN SENT FROM ABOVE.

THE LAYERS OF HEAVEN ARE JUST AS MULTITUDINOUS AS THOSE OF HELL, AFTER ALL.



LEARN, MY FRIEND.



MR. SIMMONS, MIGHT WE TALK?

WHA...?
JESUS,
LADY!

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TALK.

Huh?

OK, YES YOU DO THOUGH IT MAY NOT APPEAR THAT WAY.

CALL ME GABRIELLE, MR. SIMMONS. IF I MIGHT HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME, I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU.

NOTHING CAN HARM US IN HERE, AND WE'RE NOW OUTSIDE OF TIME AS IT'S USUALLY PERCEIVED.

WINE? THEY HAVE A FINE CHILLED CHABLIS I CAN PERSONALLY RECOMMEND.

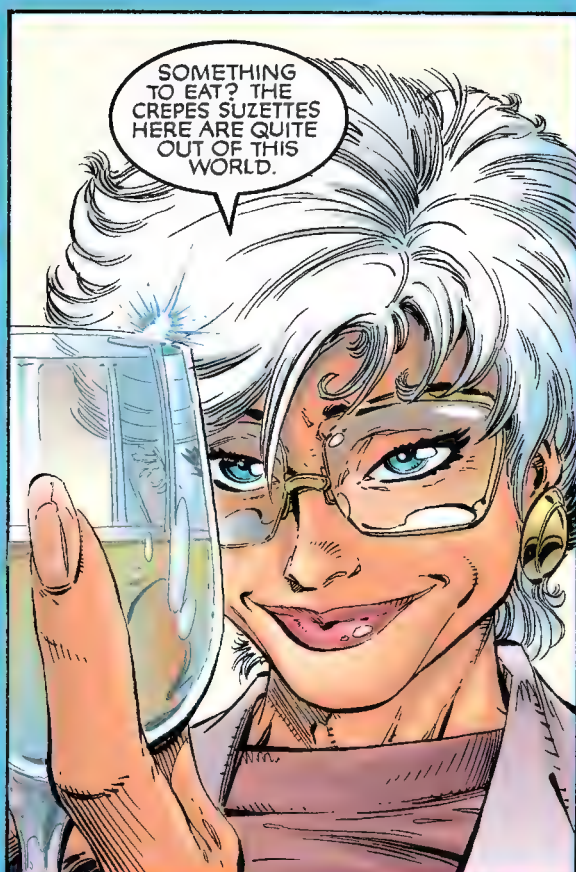
THIS, MY LIFE, EVERYTHING'S SO SCREWED UP.

NONSENSE, BUT SIT DOWN, SIT DOWN, YOU'RE MAKING ME NERVOUS.



WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

IT'S A DIMENSIONAL UMBRELLA. YOU'RE STILL IN NEW YORK, BUT WE'RE ALSO SITTING IN THE GROUNDS OF A SMALL INN IN THE LOIRE VALLEY.



SOMETHING TO EAT? THE CREPES SUZETTES HERE ARE QUITE OUT OF THIS WORLD.



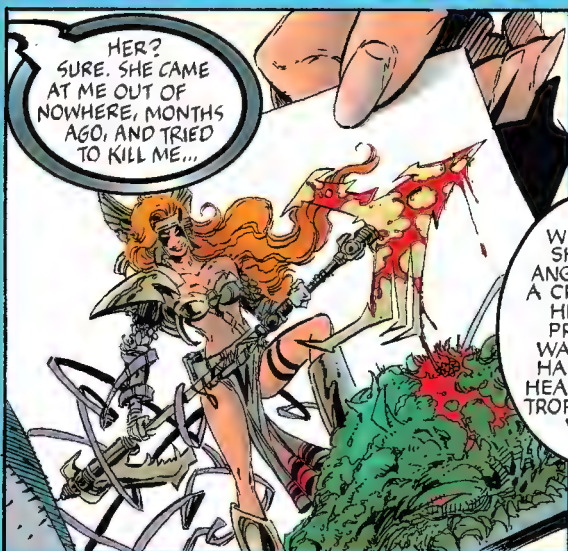
THIS IS GOOD. FIRST WINE I'VE HAD SINCE I DIED...

I'M NOT HUNGRY. WHY HAVE YOU KIDNAPPED ME?

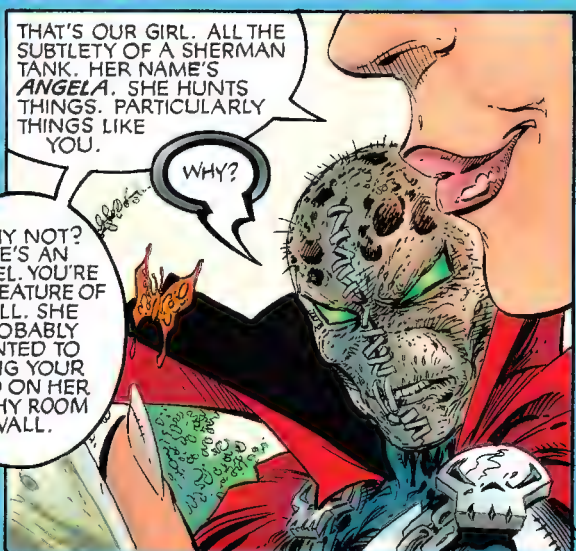
I'VE ORDERED SOME STRAWBERRIES FOR MYSELF. EVEN ANGELS WATCH THEIR WAIST-LINES...

I WOULDN'T GO SO FAR AS TO CALL IT A KIDNAPPING, MR. SIMMONS. MORE OF AN INTERMISSION.

DO YOU REMEMBER HER?



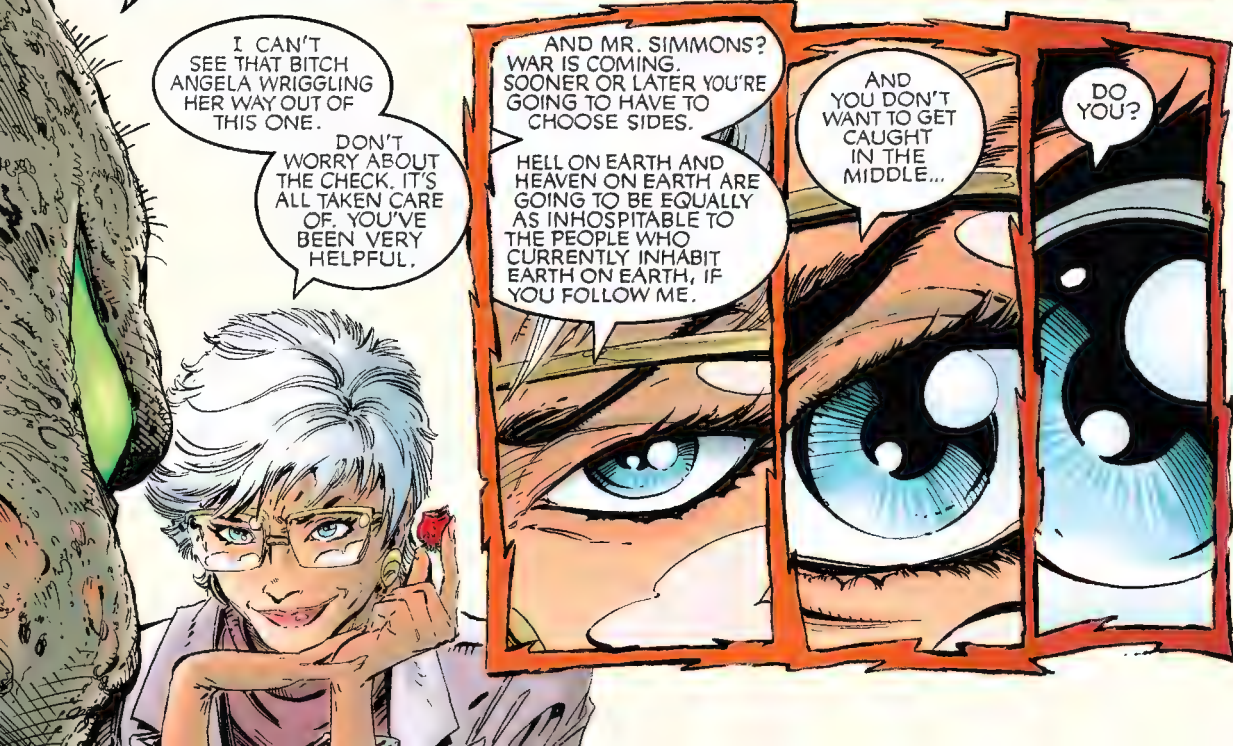
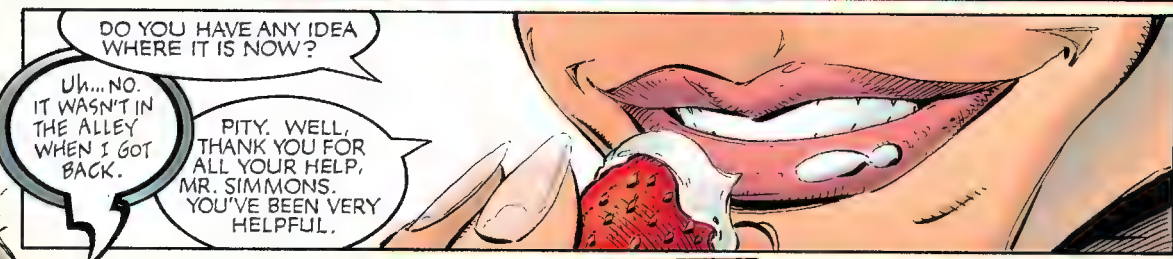
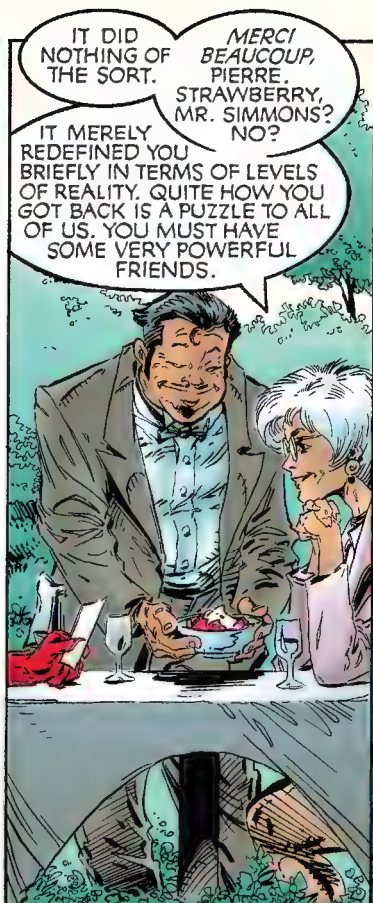
HER?
SURE. SHE CAME AT ME OUT OF NOWHERE, MONTHS AGO, AND TRIED TO KILL ME...



THAT'S OUR GIRL. ALL THE SUBTLETY OF A SHERMAN TANK. HER NAME'S *ANGELA*. SHE HUNTS THINGS. PARTICULARLY THINGS LIKE YOU.

WHY?

WHY NOT? SHE'S AN ANGEL. YOU'RE A CREATURE OF HELL. SHE PROBABLY WANTED TO HANG YOUR HEAD ON HER TROPHY ROOM WALL.



JEZUS!

WHAT
THE
HELL!?

HEAVEN,
ACTUALLY.

THOUGH
NOT THE
ONE YOU
OR I WERE
TAUGHT
ABOUT.

THEY KEEP
SMALL PIECES
OF IT IN
DIFFERENT TIME
CONTINUUMS.

HOW DO
YOU KNOW
ALL THIS?!

ARE YOU
SOME KINDA
GOD?

KEE KEE.
NOT VERY
LIKELY.

BURP

WHAT
ABOUT THESE
ANGELS THAT
SEEM TO KEEP
POPPING
UP? *

I'M JUST
A MAN, MUCH
LIKE YOURSELF.
BEEN THROUGH A
FEW WARS, TOO.
THOUGHT I WAS A
BIG SHOT, COULD
BEAT ANYONE.

I WAS
WRONG.

THEY WON.
NOT COMPLETELY,
BUT ENOUGH TO
NEUTRALIZE MY
EFFORTS. NOW, I'M NOT
ALONE IN LOOKING TO
HE WHO MAY BE THE
ONE TO STAND UP TO
THESE MANY FACTIONS
AND WIN.

AND *BELIEVE* ME,
AL, THIS DEFINITELY IS
ABOUT *WINNING*.

THEY HAVE
A NEED FOR
YOU, TOO-- BUT
I CAN'T PUT MY
FINGER ON
WHAT IT MAY
BE.

WELL-- WHEN YOU DO,
CALL ME. I NEED A
BREAK FROM ALL THIS.
SEE YA AROUND.

*MORE TO COME IN THE
ANGELA MINI-SERIES--TOM*



"YES!" **YES!!**

"EVEN **HEAVEN** IS OUT TO GET OUR SIMMONS-SPAWN! NOW HE IS **COMPLETELY** DIS-ORIENTED, GROPPING FOR ANSWERS. GOOD. BAD. UP. DOWN. HE DOESN'T KNOW **WHICH** WAY TO TURN!" **HAHAHA!!**

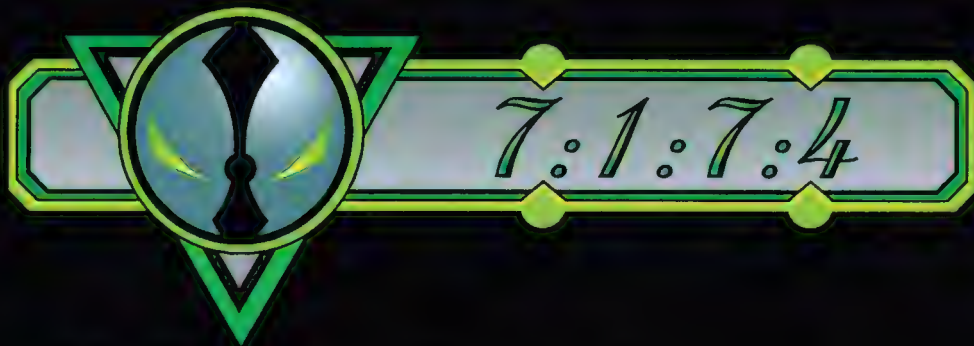
LIKE A BAD COMEDIAN, THE MALEBOLGIA LAUGHS AT HIS OWN RHETORIC. TENSING UNEXPECTEDLY, HE SQUISHES THE UNLUCKY LISTENER PERCHED IN HIS CALLOUSED HAND.

"SOON, VERY SOON, HE WILL FIND HIS ANSWER. WHEN HE DOES, IT WILL CONSUME HIM. AS IT HAS THE OTHERS BEFORE HIM."

POWER!

"IT'S YOUR CALLING... IT'S IN YOUR **BLOOD!**"

"HOW I **DO** ENJOY THIS GAME!"



THE GAME WILL HAVE AN END... BUT ITS LENGTH WILL
DEPEND UPON THE CREATIVITY OF ITS PLAYERS.

TWO NIGHTS LATER...



THAT
RIPPLE
A BIT
POWERFUL
FOR YOU,
AL?

AW.
TAKE
IT EASY,
COUNT!

FOR THE
MOMENT,
I FEEL
ALIVE! --ALMOST.

I'M FINALLY
OUT OF MY MOOD
SWING AND NOW
YOU WANT TO
RAIN ON MY
PARADE.

HEY FELLAS,
DID I TELL YOU
THAT YOUR GREAT AND
POWERFUL LEADER GOT
SUCKERED BY SOME FAT
LITTLE SLICE-AND-DICE
CLOWN, A FEW
WEEKS BACK?

YEP! I GAVE THE
RUNT A PORTION
OF MY ENERGY SO'S HE
COULD ~~SHICE~~ RIP HIS
BROTHERS APART. UN-
FORTUNATELY, IT LEFT
ME EATING DUST
FOR A DAY. *

THEN, THE
LITTLE GUY CAME
BACK TO GIVE ME
WHAT HE'D TAKEN!
CAN YOU IMAGINE...

BURP! ...A DEMON
KEEPING HIS WORD
BY RETURNING?

HA
HA
HA

...BUT NOT BEFORE
HE LAID A GOOD
SHELLACKING TO MY
HEAD... ~~SHICE~~ HA HAAHE
AM I AWESOME,
OR WHAT?!





HA HA HA HA
WEE WEE HO HO HAA

SOMEWHERE IN TIME.


HA HA HA HA
WEE WEE WEE

TENS OF MILLIONS OF
TWISTED SOULS HOWL
WITH LAUGHTER.

HA HA HA HA
HAW HEH HEH
HAW HAW HO HO HAA
WEE WEE

LOUDEST AMONG THEM IS
THEIR STORYTELLER. IT
WILL BE SOME CONSIDER-
ABLE TIME BEFORE THE
MANIACAL SOUNDS DIE
DOWN.



A full-page comic book illustration. In the center, a figure stands amidst a scene of urban devastation. The figure is dressed in a voluminous, bright red cape that billows out in all directions, creating a dramatic silhouette. Their face is obscured by deep shadow, with only two pairs of glowing green eyes visible. The figure's hands are also in shadow, holding what appear to be small, dark objects. The background is a cityscape in ruins. In the distance, a skyline of tall, dark skyscrapers is visible against a hazy, orange-tinged sky. Closer to the figure, the ground is covered in rubble, broken bricks, and twisted metal. To the right, a damaged car is partially visible. The overall color palette is dominated by the red of the cape, the greys of the rubble, and the dark tones of the city buildings.

LOST IN THE MOST
OBSCURE SHADOWS
OF A DECAYING CITY
WALKS A DEAD MAN.

TONIGHT, FOR THE
FIRST TIME SINCE HIS
RETURN, HE FEELS
DEAD.

NEXT ISSUE:
THE CURSE





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE